

Message Text

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14

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-09 NSAE-00 PA-03

RSC-01 USIA-12 PRS-01 PM-09 ACDA-19 T-03 OMB-01 GAC-01

SS-14 NSC-10 RSR-01 /099 W
----- 058837

R 150810 Z MAR 73

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 544

INFO AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

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E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: MARR, AS, US

SUBJ: DEFMIN BARNARD AT NATIONAL PRESS CLUB MARCH 15

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: DEFENSE MINISTER BARNARD WAS GUEST OF NATIONAL PRESS CLUB AT LUNCHEON MARCH 15. BARNARD'S SPEECH DEALT MAINLY WITH ORGANIZATIONAL REVIEW OF DEFENSE DEPT. NOW BEING UNDERTAKEN. ONLY NEW ITEM APPEARED TO BE ADOD FUNDING OF TWO FELLOWSHIPS AT AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY IN STRATEGIC AND DEFENSE MATTERS. SPEECH ITSELF WAS RATHER PEDESTRIAN BUT QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD REVEALED GOVERNMENT'S INTENTION TO STAND BEHIND ITS STATEMENT ON JOINT FACILITIES IN AUSTRALIA. END SUMMARY.

2. IN QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD BARNARD FIELDDED SEVERAL QUESTIONS RELATED TO FACILITIES AND TO AUSTRALIAN PURCHASE OF F111. IN DISCUSSING JOINT FACILITIES, BARNARD WAS ASKED WHETHER IT WAS TRUE AS SPECULATED IN THE PRESS THAT ALP CAUCUS STILL INTENDED TO RECONSIDER PARLIAMENTARY STATEMENT. BARNARD REPLIED THAT THERE QTE IS NO SUGGESTION END QTE THAT CAUCUS WILL RECONSIDER THE STATEMENT. (ARTICLE IN MARCH 15 AUSTRALIAN SPECULATES THAT CABINET AND NOT CAUCUS WILL UNDERTAKE QTE URGENT REVIEW END QTE OF STATEMENT, BUT BARNARD WAS NOT ASKED SPECIFICALLY ON THIS POINT.) BARNARD ALSO WENT TO SOME LENGTH TO DEFEND POSITION THAT ALP GOVERNMENT HAD GONE A GOOD DEAL FURTHER THAN PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT HAD GONE A GOOD DEAL FURTHER THAN PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT IN PROVIDING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INFORMATION ON THE FACILITIES. IN THIS REGARD HE NOTED THAT BOTH LEADING MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT AND OF THE OPPOSITION HAVE BEEN FULLY BRIEFED ON THE FACILITIES AND THAT THE ALP GOVERNMENT HAS STATED THAT THE FACILITIES ARE RELATED TO SATELLITES, COLLECT INFORMATION, AND THEY ARE NOT PART OF ANY WEAPONS SYSTEM. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT WHILE ALP GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT HAVE CONCLUDED AGREEMENTS FOR THESE FACILITIES AS THEY NOW READ, GOVERNMENT FEELS ITSELF BOUND TO PROTECT CLASSIFIED INFORMATION OF OTHER GOVERNMENTS AND THAT AGREEMENTS ARE THEREFORE BINDING ON ALP GOVERNMENT. WHEN ASKED IF IT COULD BE DENIED THAT VLF STATION AT NORTHWEST CAPE WAS NOT ENGAGED IN AT LEAST PASSING MESSAGES RELATED TO NUCLEAR MATTERS, BARNARD REPLIED THAT PURPOSE OF NORTHWEST CAPE HAD ALWAYS BEEN KNOW AND THAT HIS CONCERN AT THE MOMENT WAS HIS DISSATISFACTION WITH THE QTE CONTENT END QTE OF AUSTRALIAN INTEREST IN AND PARTICIPATION IN THE STATION'S OPERATIONS. HE STATED THAT GOVERNMENT OF AUSTRALIA SHOULD HAVE JOINT QTE CONTROL END QTE OF NORTHWEST CAPE. BARNARD REFUSED TO ANSWER QUESTION OF WHETHER MESSAGES THROUGH NORTHWEST CAPE COULD INVOLVE AUSTRALIA IN NUCLEAR WAR, WHICH HE DISMISSED AS HYPOTHETICAL.

3. WITH RELATION TO NEWSPAPER ARTICLES MARCH 15 TO EFFECT THAT BARNARD WOULD ATTEMPT TO SAVE AUSTRALIAN TAX PAYERS \$30 MILLION ON PURCHASE OF F111 S NOW ORDERED AND SPARE PARTS FOR ONE YEAR, BARNARD INDICATED THAT SUCH ATTEMPT WOULD BE MADE. WHEN ASKED WHAT WERE HIS BARGAINING COUNTERS IN DISCUSSION WITH USG, BARNARD MADE TWO SUGGESTIONS: A) AUSTRALIA HAS WAITED APPROXIMATELY 10 YEARS FOR DELIVERY OF AIRCRAFT AND FELT THIS MIGHT BE FACTOR IN GAINING RELEASE FROM PAYMENT OF REMAINING \$30 MILLION AND B) PRICES IN 10- YEAR PERIOD HAVE ESCALATED AND POINT COULD BE MADE THAT IF AIRCRAFT HAD BEEN DELIVERED SOONER, TOTAL COST WOULD HAVE BEEN LESS. BARNARD DECLINED TO SAY FURTHER, INDICATING HE DID NOT WANT TO TIP HIS HAND CONCERNING NEGOTIATIONS ON THIS SUBJECT. IN COURSE OF ANSWERING QUESTIONS, BARNARD STATED ORIGINAL PURPOSE FOR WHICH F111 WAS ORDERED, I. E. TO HAVE AIRCRAFT WITH ABILITY TO FLY TO INDONESIA AND BACK, WAS NO LONGER PERTINENT. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT F111 IS NEW AIRCRAFT BUT THAT AUSTRALIA WOULD BE UNABLE TO AFFORD ANY MORE THAN CONVENTIONAL ARMAMENTS FOR IT. HE NOTED THAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER FOR AUSTRALIA TO HAVE ORDERED THE F-4 PHANTOM AIRCRAFT BUT THAT DECISION MADE BY DEFENSE MINISTER FRASER IN 1970 REGARDING ULTIMATE PURCHASE OF F111 REMAINED BINDING ON CURRENT GOVERNMENT AND THERE WAS NO WAY FOR THEM TO ESCAPE RESPONSIBILITY.

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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a

*** Current Classification *** LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 15 MAR 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: boyleja
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973CANBER01497
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: n/a
Errors: n/a
Film Number: n/a
From: CANBERRA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19730329/aaaahuql.tel
Line Count: 121
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: boyleja
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15 OCT 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <15-Oct-2001 by kelleyw0>; APPROVED <17-Oct-2001 by boyleja>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CORRECTED> jms 971204
Subject: DEFMIN BARNARD AT NATIONAL PRESS CLUB MARCH 15
TAGS: MARR, AS, US
To: EA
SECSTATE WASHDC
WELLINGTON
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005